

BRONZE STAR with VALOR RECOMMENDATION  
SPECIALIST JOSHUA BIRKEL  
LIGHT WHEEL VEHICLE MECHANIC

On 20 March 2005, Convoy 678N was traveling north on Alternate Supply Route Bismark enroute to Logistic Supply Area Anaconda when forty to fifty anti-coalition forces with the intent to cause U.S. casualties ambushed the convoy. The ambush consisted of the following elements: heavy small arms fire; an improvised explosive device placed in the road median; two road obstacles meant to funnel and fix the convoy; accurate rocket propelled grenade fire with direct hits to vehicles; and a ground assault of 10-15 insurgents upon a line of convoy escort platforms. The insurgents captured were carrying handcuffs suggesting they were intending to capture American troops. Specialist Birkel was the passenger in the maintenance M915 positioned in the rear of the convoy when the convoy came to a sudden halt. Specialist Birkel heard a barrage of gunfire and the cries of a wounded soldier over the radio. Rocket propelled grenades were falling on forward trucks and more soldiers were being wounded. Specialist Birkel was monitoring his radio and heard that Sergeant Ricketts was wounded and on the ground and needed to be removed from the kill zone. Shortly after hearing of the sergeant needing extraction, Specialist Sharples ran up to Specialist Birkel's truck and told him that the civilian drivers in the convoy had dismounted and that he needed Specialist Birkel's help getting them back in. As Specialist Birkel dismounted, he broadcast over the radio that he was going to go find Sergeant Ricketts and get him out of the kill zone. Specialist Birkel and Specialist Sharples, covered by Specialist Schrad and the gunner of the convoy escort platform behind them, ran three to four hundred meters to the front of the convoy while under fire and found Sergeant Ricketts lying next to a civilian truck. Ron Hart, the retired Army Department of Defense driver of that truck, had already assisted another soldier in moving Sergeant Ricketts and was providing suppressive fire with another soldier's M249 squad automatic weapon. Specialist Birkel and Specialist Sharples placed Sergeant Ricketts in Mr. Hart's truck and told Mr. Hart to get in and get out of the kill zone. As Specialist Birkel and Specialist Sharples were returning to their vehicles, they coerced the civilian drivers out of the ditches that they were hiding in, often times they had to force the civilians back into their trucks. The drivers remounted and started following Mr. Hart out when Specialist Birkel noticed that another truck with its driver in it was not moving. Specialist Birkel assessed that the truck's airlines had been damaged and, with the help of Specialist Sharples, instructed one of the civilian bobtails to hook up with the trailer. After they transferred trailers, Specialist Birkel ran back to his truck and stayed in the area until all of the other vehicles that could leave had left and made sure the convoy escort platforms did not need any mechanical help. Specialist Birkel's complete disregard for his own safety saved the life of a wounded soldier and allowed for the convoy to move out of the kill zone. His actions reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.